

# School & Court Linkages

*A Periodic Newsletter of the Superintendents - Judges Liaison Committee*

**Issue 5, March 2002**

## **Current membership:**

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Superintendent of Public Instruction*

*Mr. Robert N. Baldwin  
Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia*

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This newsletter summarizes recent discussions of the Superintendents-Judges Liaison Committee. The Committee, created in 1995, is designed to establish a permanent liaison that will maintain open lines of communication between superintendents and judges and address issues of mutual concern. The committee consists of eight school division superintendents and eight juvenile and domestic relations court judges, one from each of the superintendents' regions.

Meetings are held twice each year. The superintendent and judge from each region also host regional meetings of superintendents and judges on a periodic basis.

Prior newsletter topics include truancy reduction, search and seizure, suicide prevention, school re-enrollment plan, special education programs in regional or local jails. Inquiries and requests for back issues of the newsletter can be directed to:

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### **Region VII**

*Dr. Alan T. Lee  
Washington County Public Schools*

*The Honorable J. Wesley McClintock, III  
Tazewell County Juvenile and Domestic  
Relations District Court*

### **Region VIII**

*Dr. Larry Hixon  
Amelia County Public Schools*

*The Honorable Michael M. Rand  
Halifax Juvenile and Domestic Relations  
District Court*

## **Spotlight:**

### ***Virginia State Crime Commission Study of School Safety Officers and School Security Specialists***

Kim Echelberger, Senior Policy Analyst at the Virginia State Crime Commission reported on the Commission's examination of the role, responsibilities, training, and authority of school security officers and school safety specialists.

There were 129 School Resource Officer programs, with 427 officers, in Virginia in 1999. (School Resource Officers are trained, certified, law enforcement officers hired by local sheriffs and police departments to provide security in public schools.) All SROs are required to have 240 hours of law enforcement training. Ninety-three percent of SROs, including all those funded through a grant from the Department of Criminal Justice Services, also have 40 hours of school-related training.

School Safety/Security Officers are employed by local school divisions to assist in school safety. The training for these officers varies statewide, with no minimum requirements statewide.

The Commission also addressed issues regarding the differentiation between school resource officers, school safety officers, and school security officers, specifically uniformity of training and legal implications in search and seizure situations. The study was completed for the 2002 General Assembly.

# Spotlight: *Truancy*

The Liaison Committee recently received an update on the state's Truancy reduction initiative from Marsha Owens, Student Services Specialist at the Virginia Department of education.

*Truancy is the first sign of trouble, the first indicator that a young person is giving up or losing his or her way. When young people start skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials, and the community that they are in trouble and need our help if they are to keep moving forward in life.*

*U.S. Department of Education,  
Manual to Combat Truancy*

The General Assembly first funded grants to school divisions in 1996. Currently 198 schools in 74 divisions receive funding. These grants focus on intervention in elementary and middle schools.

In 1999, the General Assembly amended the truancy and compulsory attendance requirements of the Code of Virginia (§22.1-258) to promote earlier intervention. The requirements are as follows:

- After a student has been absent for five days without indication that the parent is aware of and supports the absence, the principal must make a reasonable effort to contact the parent to obtain an explanation of the absence and explain the consequences of nonattendance. The attendance officer, student and parent shall jointly develop a plan to resolve the nonattendance that includes documentation of the reasons for nonattendance.
- If the student is absent an additional day after this direct contact with the pupil's parent and there is no indication that the parent is aware or and supports the absence, the attendance officer shall schedule a conference to resolve issues related

to the pupil's nonattendance. This conference may include other community service providers. The conference shall be held no later than 15 school days after the sixth absence.

- Upon the next absence without indication that the parent is aware of and supports the absence the attendance officer shall be informed. The attendance officer may file a complaint with the juvenile and domestic relations court, alleging the student is a child in need of supervision (COV §16.1-228) or by instituting proceedings against the parent relating to the compulsory attendance law (COV §18.2-371 or §22.1-262).

The General Assembly also revised the reporting requirements (§22.1-260), with the result that the Virginia Depart-

ment of Education (VDOE) now receives the number of pupils by grade level for whom a conference was scheduled.

The Committee reviewed the first year of such data. As this is the first year the localities implemented the new truancy requirements and collected and forwarded data to VDOE, it is likely that the data does not yet present a complete and accurate picture. However, certain observations can be made about the number of required conferences held with parents regarding their child's nonattendance:

- The number of conferences was highest in grade 9 (7,394).
- Conferences are held more often for students in middle school and high school than for students in elementary school.

A review of the data suggests that there is a continuing need for prevention and early intervention programs targeting school attendance.

Contact Marsha Owens with any questions at (804) 225-2928 or [mowens@mail.vak12ed.edu](mailto:mowens@mail.vak12ed.edu)

## Spotlight: *Study of Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance Requiring Out-of-Home Placement*

Kristi S. Wright, Legislative Policy Analyst with the Virginia Commission on Youth, reported on the Commission's study. She reported that 20 documents and reports on issues related to children with serious emotional disturbance in Virginia have been completed since 1988. Recurring issues in all studies are:

- the importance of early identification and early intervention in a community system of care,
- case management,
- the reduction of state, psychiatric beds for children without increased support for alternatives in the community,
- inadequate funding of services,
- the importance of training, technical assistance and outcome evaluation in developing a community system of care.

The study found the following gaps in services in Virginia:

- emergency crisis intervention services
- day treatment,
- family support services,
- residential services,
- early intervention services, and
- case management.

Ms. Wright also reported that the quality of services received could vary based on the lack of qualified professionals and lack of financial resources in certain areas of the state.

Final study findings and recommendations can be found on the Commission on Youth web page at <http://legis.state.va.us/coy/youth.htm>.